

EVERYDAY MEDITATION

Emotional Sensations in the Body

“On a very basic level all beings think that they should be happy. When life becomes difficult or painful, we feel that something has gone wrong. This wouldn’t be a big problem except for the fact that when we feel something’s gone wrong, we’re willing to do anything to feel okay again. Even start a fight...”

As long as we’re caught up in always looking for certainty and happiness, rather than honoring the taste and smell and quality of exactly what is happening, as long as we’re always running away from discomfort, we’re going to be caught in a cycle of unhappiness and disappointment, and we will feel weaker and weaker. This way of seeing helps us to develop inner strength. And what’s especially encouraging is the view that inner strength is available to us at just the moment when we think we’ve hit the bottom, when things are at their worst.”

—Pema Chödrön, *Practicing Peace in Times of War*

THREE WAYS TO KNOW WHAT WE ARE FEELING (Shinzen Young)

Moment by moment, in terms of tangible sensory experience, a person will know his or her feeling state in exactly one of three ways:

1. Through thoughts in the mind linked to feelings in the body
2. Through feelings in the body with little or no thoughts. This is how babies and animals experience feelings.
3. Through thoughts in the mind with little or no related feeling in the body

FOUR FACETS OF BODY SENSATION (Shinzen Young)

Flavor

Intrinsic sensory quality. Body sensations that seem to be emotional in nature may be well-defined in terms of flavor, or they may be ill-defined (something vaguely pleasant, something vaguely unpleasant).

Some common flavors include:

- Anger
- Fear
- Sadness
- Embarrassment
- Impatience
- Disgust
- Hopelessness
- Interest
- Joy
- Love
- Gratitude
- Humor
- Erotic
- Rest

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Some flavors are actually a combination of these flavors. Some possible examples include:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Confusion | Fear, sadness, agitation, anger, helplessness |
| Guilt | Fear, anger, sadness, shame, disgust |
| Curiosity | Interest, agitation |
| Jealousy | Anger, sadness, tension |
| Desire or will | Joy, interest, fear, sadness, agitation |

“Not all emotions, not all states of mind have been named. Nor are all the names we have been given always accurate.”

—Ron Carlson, *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*

Intensity

Level of activity at any given instant. A particular quality at a particular location may be absent, mild, medium, or strong in intensity.

Geometry

Spatial distribution within the body.

- Local details of form – size, shape location
- General spatial distribution – single location, several disconnected locations, even distribution throughout the body

Impermanence

Movement and change. The flavor, intensity, and geometry of sensations typically change instant-by-instant, even if only subtly.

CULTIVATING EQUANIMITY

We cultivate equanimity in the body by letting go of judgments about sensations we are experiencing and replacing them with an attitude of acceptance and matter-of-factness.

Let's say that you have a strong sensation in one part of your body. As you focus attention on what is happening over your whole body, you notice that you are tensing your jaw, clenching your fists, tightening your gut, and scrunching your shoulders. Each time you become aware of tensing in some area, you intentionally relax it to whatever degree possible. A moment later you may notice that the tensing has started again in some area; once again gently relax it to whatever degree possible. If there are areas that cannot be relaxed much or at all, try to accept the tension sensations and just observe them.

As a result of maintaining this whole-body relaxed state, you may begin to notice subtle flavors of sensation spreading from the local area of intensity and coursing through your body. These are the sensations that you had been masking by tension. Now that they have been uncovered, try to create a mental attitude of welcoming them, not judging them. Observe them with gentle matter-of-factness, giving them permission to dance their dance, to flow as they wish through your body.

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EXERCISES

Noting Emotional States in the Body (Shinzen Young)

1. **Settle in.** The first thing to observe when you begin a formal meditation practice is the sense of your body physically settling into your posture. Lengthen the spine as you inhale, and observe any sensations associated with relaxation on as you exhale. Take a couple of minutes to enjoy this. Establish a balance between a state of alertness and repose.
2. **Chose a domain.** The sensory domains include physical-type sensations in the body, emotional-type sensations in the body, mental images, and internal conversations.

In this technique we will be focusing on emotional-type sensations in the body. We will refer to this area as Feel Space. Feel Space is the three-dimensional volume of the body when experienced from the perspective of detecting the presence or absence of Feel Activity.

3. **Position your attention.** Position your attention in Feel Space. Place your attention over your whole body: two arms, two legs, the head, and torso all connected. Take a minute to feel satisfied that you are well positioned in this domain.
4. **Start noting.** The Basic States to note in Touch Space are Feel and Peace.

Feel

Body sensations that seem emotional in nature. Feel may be well-defined in terms of quality, or it may be ill-defined (something vaguely pleasant, something vaguely unpleasant). Feel may be well-defined in terms of location (specific emotional centers or “hot spots”), or it may be difficult to ascribe a location to it (vaguely distributed through a region or throughout the whole body).

The label for activity in Feel Space is “Feel.”

Peace

The conscious awareness that there is little or no Feel activity in Feel Space. Peace is an abbreviation for “emotional peace,” and signifies the restful aspect of Feel Space. It is most easily detected as “idling” or as a sense of tranquility in your emotional centers.

The label for restful aspects in Feel Space is “Peace.”

Gone

If what you are noting vanishes, you can either note this with the label “Gone” or you can simply move on to the next state to which your attention is pulled.

5. **Establish a rhythm.** Focus on that state for a few seconds, letting your attention soak into it to the best of your ability. After a few seconds, note again, either the same state or a different one.
6. **What doesn’t matter?** It doesn’t matter whether you are always noting the same states or continually circulating around to different locations within the body. It doesn’t matter whether you mostly note activity or mostly note rest or cover them both relatively equally.
7. **What does matter?**
 - Stay in Feel Space. If you get pulled into Touch, Image, Talk, Sight, or Sound Space, gently return to Feel Space.
 - When you note a restful state, let it pull you into equanimity and consistently concentrate on that flavor of rest.
 - When you notice an active state, bring equanimity to it and let your awareness soak into it.

Friendship Meditation (from Sharon Salzberg)

Getting in touch with our desire that the people we love be safe, happy, healthy, and comfortable helps us begin to broaden the scope of our empathy.

May my family/friends/loved ones be safe.
May my family/friends/loved ones be happy.
May my family/friends/loved ones be healthy.
May my family/friends/loved ones find some ease in my life as it is.

HOMEWORK

1. Fifteen to twenty minutes of formal practice each day using the technique of your choice. (You can download free meditation timers at www.audiodharma.org/timer/timer.html.)
2. Give one activity each day your full attention.
3. STOP* when smiling or feeling impatient.
 - Stop whatever you’re doing. Pause.
 - Take a slow, aware scan of your body.
 - Observe the physical and emotional sensations in the body.
 - Proceed. Continue with whatever you were doing.

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